U. S. News & World Report

JAN 7 1963

FOIAb3b

[redacted]

Prisoners Tell—

THE REAL STORY OF THE BAY OF PIGS

It is possible now, for the first time, to tell the invaders' own story of the assault against Castro that failed.

The story is told by the young Cubans who fought and lost at the Bay of Pigs, and who have just been freed from Castro prisons.

Howard Handleman of the staff of "U. S. News & World Report" knew many of these men before the ill-starred invasion. He was on hand to meet them when they returned to Florida.

The following is based on hours of interviewing the ransomed prisoners.

MIAMI, Fla.

Who is to blame for the disaster at the Bay of Pigs?

Was there ever a chance that the anti-Castro invasion by 1,500 or so young Cubans could have overthrown the Communist regime in Cuba?

At last, the men who were there are free to answer these questi and to tell the story of what may turn out to be one of this Hemisphere's important battles.

These men, returning after 20 months in Castro's prisons, are remarkably free of rancor. One of them says, "By no means do we feel our friends deserted us." But the story they tell adds up to this:

If the United States had lived up to all its promises, the Bay of Pigs invasion would have succeeded and Castro would have been overthrown.

The U. S. promised air support. It didn't come.

The U. S. promised supplies. They didn't arrive.

The U. S. promised reinforcements by Cuban infantry units. They never showed up.

Even the equipment provided the Cuban brigade for the invasion didn't work. Tank turrets wouldn't turn. Ships' winches wouldn't work. Engines on landing boats were so faulty they had to be repaired under fire, after the invasion was started. Radio operators were not given the frequencies they needed to keep in touch with headquarters.

Maps of the landing beaches indicated there was sand where there actually were rocks. Some of the infantrymen who went ashore carried Garand rifles—but they had ammunition clips for old Springfield rifles.

Above all, the very planning was makeshift. Nowhere in the plans was there provision for retreat—a fundamental of any military operational plan.

On April 17, 1961, Castro's militia was poised and ready for the kill.

Amateurish as the invasion was, the commander of one whole sector of Castro's defense front tried to surrender, along with his 1,000 men, to 80 paratroopers of the invading force. But the paratroopers had run out of ammunition and had to retreat.

Even so, the invading troops killed an estimated 1,800 of Castro's soldiers and wounded another 4,000. They captured 800. That adds up to five Castro casualties for every man put ashore by the invading brigade.

Details of the battle were given to "U. S. News & World Report" by three of the invaders who fought at the Bay of Pigs:

Orlando Cuervo, who was Castro's Under Secretary of Commerce until August of 1960, was chief of communications on the beach at the Bay of Pigs.

Alberto Fowler, member of a leading sugar and construction family and an early Castro supporter, was in a bazooka team in the second battalion.

Juan José Arteaga, 16 at the time of the invasion, was a forward observer for the fourth battalion.

Time and again, while recounting the story of the battle, Fowler, Cuervo or Arteaga would ask whether the American military, in World War II, made the same mistakes that were made at the Bay of Pigs.

Mr. Cuervo, senior of the three men, told how the whole affair started.

In May of 1960, an anti-Castro organization in Miami—the Democratic Revolutionary Front—began recruiting young Cubans for military service. This was the same month that the Central Intelligence Agency began supporting the Front.

The plan was modest at first. The Front sent 40 men to a small island somewhere in the Caribbean. These men were given guerrilla training because planning, at that time, was limited to guerrilla probes in Cuba.

In August, more Cubans were sent to Guatemala for training as infiltration forces.

Then, in November, the whole plan changed.

Instead of guerrillas and infiltrators, it was decided to organize a conventional invasion force. It was then that recruiting was stepped up and a commando brigade formed.

Some of the original 40 chosen for guerrilla training were sent to the Panama Canal Zone for advance work in special warfare. Others from the first group went to Guatemala to begin building the camp for the new "Liberation Army."

The [illegible] up. In December, the trained infiltrators began to move into Cuba. All told, about 80 slipped into the island. They had two missions—to sabotage, and to organize an anti-Castro underground.

[illegible] infiltration teams that touched off a wave of [illegible] the weeks just preceding the invasion.

[illegible] 1961, the brigade was training hard at its [illegible] high in the Guatemalan mountains. To ac-